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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 009963

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/19/2015

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINS CVIS CO

SUBJECT: KIDNAPPING OF ORLANDO VALENCIA RECEIVES WIDE ATTENTION; AMBASSADOR CALLS ON SENIOR GOC OFFICIALS

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶11. (U) Post learned from NGO sources that Afro-Colombian leader Orlando Valencia was reportedly kidnapped on Saturday, October 15. Post has raised Valencia's case at all levels of the GOC to press for quick action to ensure his safety. End summary.

Initial NGO Reports of Kidnapping

¶12. (U) On Sunday, October 16 Embassy received a call from the U.S. NGO Chicago Metropolitan Sanctuary Alliance (CSMA), who reported that Afro-Colombian leader Orlando Valencia had been kidnapped on October 15 on the border of Choco and Antioquia Departments. The initial NGO reports were that the police had stopped a convoy in which Valencia had been traveling and accused him of being associated with the FARC. After questioning, the police released Valencia, who reportedly was subsequently followed by what the NGOs said were "known paramilitaries," and forced to go with them on a motorcycle. The NGOs said Valencia had been missing since Saturday afternoon, October 15.

Post Acts to Press GOC for Valencia's Safe Return

¶13. (C) Embassy contacted (in some cases numerous times) the offices of the Human Rights Unit of the Fiscalia, the Human Rights Unit of the Ministry of Defense, the Central Directorate of the Judicial and Investigative Police (DIJIN), and the Vice President's Office on Human Rights and Humanitarian International Law. The Ambassador raised the case with Attorney General Mario Iguaran and Minister of Defense Camilo Ospina. Polcouns briefed Vice President Santos. GOC officials reported that as soon as they heard about the kidnapping the police formed a search party consisting of members of the Technical Investigative Corps (CTI), the Police and the Army. Col. Oscar Naranjo, director of the DIJIN, told Deputy Polcouns that the Judicial Investigations Section of the Police (SIJIN) was also involved in the search. Since it began at approximately 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, October 15, the search has yielded no results.

¶ 4. (C) Embassy also contacted Carlos Franco, the Vice President's Representative for Human Rights, who was in Washington to attend human rights hearings at the Organization of American States. Franco was already aware of the case and contacted representatives of the Catholic Church, who spoke to paramilitary representatives in the area and learned that the paramilitaries claimed not to have been involved with Valencia's abduction.

Embassy Meets with NGO for First-Hand Account

¶ 5. (C) On October 19, Deputy Polcouns invited representatives of the NGO Comision Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz ("Justicia y Paz") to the Embassy for a first-hand account of the circumstances surrounding Valencia's disappearance. According to Rafael Figueroa, an attorney accompanying Valencia for Justicia y Paz, while returning to his home town near Chigorodo, Choco Department, the police stopped Valencia at a road block at approximately 11:30AM. In addition to Figueroa, Valencia was traveling with nine members of the Jiguamiando indigenous community and a Canadian representative from Justicia y Paz. The police asked them to provide identification and explain the purpose of their travel. The Police said they were looking for a reinserted FARC guerrilla traveling in the region, and they believed Valencia was that person. In the meantime, said Figueroa, a "well-known, active paramilitary" in the region who had passed by the road block started to hang around the police station, entering and leaving during the interrogation process. Different members of the traveling party were released over the next hour, and Valencia was released around 12:30 p.m. As he attempted to enter the house of Mr. Enrique Petro and rejoin the eleven others he was traveling with, some 200 yards from the police station, he was stopped by two men who arrived on a motorcycle. One of the men had a revolver and told Valencia that he would have to go with them or they would kill him there. Valencia went with the men. Deputy Polcouns provided the national police with a copy of Justicia y Paz's October 18 official complaint about this matter, which Justicia y Paz had already sent to the Fiscalia, Foreign Ministry, and Defensoria del Pueblo.

NGO Speculation on Motives for Kidnapping

¶ 6. (C) Justicia y Paz said that Valencia was a member of an indigenous community for which the InterAmerican Court of Human Rights had ordered "protective measures." According to the NGO Peace Brigades International (PBI), Valencia is a prominent Afro-Colombian leader, perhaps on his way to becoming elected the next legal representative of the Consejo Mayor of Curvarado. In a meeting last September in the municipality of Murnido, Valencia reportedly directly confronted Carlos Franco, demanding an answer from the State regarding the protection of the lives of the African-Colombians in the region. We understand he asked for accountability of and protection from the "palmicultores, state and para-state agents."

NGOs Head to Region

¶ 7. (C) PBI will participate in a delegation to Bajira and Jiguamiando on October 20 to meet with the local and regional police, the 17th Brigade of the Army, and the local offices of the Fiscalia, Procuraduria and the Defensoria. The delegation will consist of members of the NGOs Justicia y Paz, PBI, Christian Aid, and the Colombian Commission of Jurists; officials from the local offices of the Fiscalia, Procuraduria and Defensoria; and two officials from the Ministry of the Interior who deal with communities at risk and human rights issues.

Comment

¶8. (C) Valencia wanted to attend a conference in Chicago organized by the NGO "Chicagoans for a Peaceful Colombia." While the consular officer who interviewed Valencia was able to verify the destination and purpose of his proposed trip, Valencia was unable to overcome Section 214(b) ineligibility.

End comment.

WOOD